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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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PARIS FOR GREG D'ELIA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TO](#)
SUBJECT: TOGO -- 47TH INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION

¶1. (U) Charge attended the celebration of Togo's Independence on April 27th, held in Dapaong, the northernmost city in Togo. About 15,000 people, military and civilian, marched in the parade. The location and size of the celebration might be taken as an indication of the evolution of national identity in post-Eyadema Togo.

¶2. (U) Background: Togo achieved independence from France on April 27, 1960. Sylvanus Olympio, the first president (and a southerner of the Ewe tribe) was assassinated on January 13, 1963 and Gnassingbe Eyadema came to power in Africa's first coup on January 13, 1967. On September 23, 1986 he successfully resisted a coup attempt. As part of his utilization of a cult of personality to leverage his power over a 38-year dictatorship, Eyadema played down the April 27 date and played up the September 23 and January 13 dates. Since Eyadema's sudden death and the ensuing civil unrest in early 2005, the government of President Faure Gnassingbe has been promoting national reconciliation. The GoT seems to be looking for ways to transition away from the divisive celebrations of the past. The celebration of September 23 is popular with military so the most recent iteration of the ceremony in 2006 was a low-key event held at the main military camp in Lome. This was a change from past practice, which was to block a major transportation artery in Lome and hold a day-long parade. Of note from the January 13, 2007 celebration is the fact that the Prime Minister, the leader of a southern opposition party, did not attend. The Embassy was represented at a low level at both events.

¶3. (U) The GoT recently announced that, henceforth, April 27 Independence Day would be celebrated at a different city each year. Local businesses get a boost from the influx of visitors and parade participants. The government will usually widen and repave the stretch of road over which the parade will pass and will provide some other public works. In Dapaong, the GoT elected to pave a short stretch of road for the parade and construct an improved open-air market structure. Construction on the market had not progressed far enough for President Faure to present it to the people.

¶4. (U) On April 27, the Union des Forces de Changement (UFC), the party of Sylvanus Olympio, led by his son, Gilchrist Olympio, held their own independence celebration at their stronghold in Atakpame, 100 miles north of Lome.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: One might infer that the GoT is equivocal at some level about national reconciliation. A big celebration sponsored by the government to mark the real date of Independence of Togo after many years of neglect is a positive indication. The fact that the celebration was held

400 miles north of the homeland of the father of independence, Sylvanus Olympio, and not far from the home place of the self-styled father of the nation Gnassingbe Eyadema (who was implicated in the assassination of Sylvanus), makes one wonder what message the GoT intended to send. End Comment.

DIFFILY